UNITED
NATIONS

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Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1999/1170
15 November 1999
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: ARABIC

LETTER DATED 15 NOVEMBER 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a letter dated 8 November 1999 from Mr. Saadoun Hammadi, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Iraq, concerning the grave consequences produced by the maintenance of the embargo unjustly imposed on Iraq and by the repeated attacks carried out by the United States on infrastructure vital to the survival of the Iraqi people.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Saeed H. HASAN
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Letter dated 8 November 1999 from the Speaker of the National Assembly of Iraq addressed to the Secretary-General

The members of the National Assembly believe that they have a responsibility to their constituents, the people of Iraq, in the harsh conditions all Iraqis are experiencing. You are, of course, aware of the economic embargo of the past nine years and of the fact that these years have been punctuated by constant military assaults, planned and carried out by the United States, targeting all aspects of life and based on the refusal of that country to allow the people of Iraq to live a life of dignity and exercise its free and independent will. The maintenance of the embargo and the ongoing United States attacks have resulted in the destruction of infrastructure and of basic utilities essential to the survival of Iraqis. This includes plants for the treatment and distribution of drinking water, which is an important resource and one fundamental to the maintenance of life and to survival. The present painful situation has had grave consequences for these plants that have had repercussions on the lives of Iraqis owing to the diminished efficiency and reduced capacities of these plants and the absence of the basic requirements for their continued operation. In their present condition they have become a source of complaints from citizens and of increased suffering on their part. In view of this situation and so that the representatives of the people in the National Assembly might know the true state of affairs with respect to the condition to which water treatment plants had been reduced, members carried out field visits to such plants in all parts of Iraq at the governorate, district, subdistrict and village levels. Two hundred and fifty members took part in the visits, each in the region where his constituency was located, and their travels took them to treatment plants and sources of water supply as well as to reservoirs in villages and the countryside and to maintenance departments. They also held meetings with citizens, officials and water plant personnel. The visits were expanded to include large numbers of dwellings, public establishments, government offices, hospitals, universities, schools, houses of worship and factories.

Thus direct knowledge of the drinking-water situation was acquired in terms of the quantities available and the extent to which they met actual needs as well as the reasons for the disruption of water supply to citizens. The extent to which water was fit for human consumption was determined after samples had been taken from various sites and at various times for testing by the relevant laboratories in order establish whether they met the health standards for potable water.

The visits, which took place over a period of seven consecutive days, revealed the facts set forth hereunder. We submit them for your consideration.

1. Many water treatment plants are no longer capable of functioning in terms of their capacity, ability to meet standards and uninterrupted operation. The reasons for this are obsolescence and poor maintenance because of the unavailability of the spare parts they require, most of them having been damaged by military action. In their present condition, they can no longer meet

citizens' needs for drinking water and have, indeed, become a public health hazard.

2. Water treatment plants operate on electric power, and Iraq is undergoing a reduction in the amount of energy produced because of the destruction of electric power stations or the damage done to them during the aggression against it. There is also the persistence shown by the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom in the Security Council Committee established by resolution 661 (1990) in obstructing the conclusion and processing of contracts under the memorandum of understanding of 20 May 1996 for the supply of spare parts for electric power stations. The disruption of electricity supply to water treatment plants thus brings pumping to a halt and prevents water from reaching citizens while also destroying the effectiveness of water treatment chemicals.

3. There is an acute shortage of water treatment chemicals, which are included in the contracts under the memorandum of understanding, because their delivery to the country is being obstructed. Thus in laboratory tests conducted in Baghdad 47 of 129 samples failed to meet the required standard, and the number of substandard samples is greater in the country's other governorates.

4. It transpires that some 30 per cent of citizens countrywide are entirely without drinking water as a result of the suspension of development plans over the past 10 years because of the embargo imposed on Iraq. This has required a halt to the construction of new water treatment plants such as the Rusafah plant in Baghdad and the dozens planned for other governorates.

5. Water distribution networks have deteriorated and become subject to ruptures as a result of obsolescence and the lack of resources for their renewal because of the impact of the embargo. The state of such networks has caused the leakage, loss and contamination of drinking water.

6. In visits to hospitals, the staff reported that large numbers of in-patients and out-patients had contracted various diseases as a result of drinking unsafe water and that many had died of such diseases.

7. The degraded level of operation of water treatment plants and its grave consequences have persisted. It would have been possible to remedy the situation, if only partially, by releasing Iraqi assets held by foreign banks for use in financing maintenance work. However, the well-known position adopted by the United States in its persistence in harming the people of Iraq and violating its rights has prevented the release of such assets.

We are sure that you appreciate the gravity of the facts we have placed before you, their impact on the health of Iraqi citizens and the extent to which they deprive Iraqis of their natural rights. On the basis of the foregoing, the National Assembly makes the points set forth hereunder in the hope that they will receive your support and that of the representatives of the international community in the Security Council.

1. All the evidence indicates that there is no solution other than the lifting of the embargo being maintained without legal or moral justification against

Iraq, the country having done everything required of it by the relevant Security Council resolutions.

2. The United Nations should adopt a resolution prohibiting in time of war the targeting of cities and residential neighbourhoods as well as attacks on all installations relating to the lives of civilians.

3. The representatives of the people of Iraq urge an immediate halt to the daily attacks being carried out by United States and British aircraft under the cloak of the so-called aerial exclusion zones imposed on Iraq without any legal basis, inasmuch as these attacks target civilian and services-related installations such as electric power stations and water treatment plants in such a way as to affect the lives of Iraqis in an adverse manner and inflict harm on them.

4. The international humanitarian organizations should play an active role in mitigating the suffering of the people of Iraq that has been caused by the unjust embargo now entering its ninth year. They should strive most earnestly for the lifting of the embargo, given that the 1996 memorandum of understanding has not been able to meet the living requirements of all Iraqis and in the light of the inhuman position taken by the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom in the Security Council Committee established by resolution 611 (1990), obstructing as it does the processing of contracts under the memorandum of understanding.

5. The National Assembly of Iraq invites all men of good will throughout the world and those whose consciences are moved by the suffering of the people of Iraq, whether parliamentarians or members of international humanitarian organizations, to visit Iraq in order to ascertain the true nature of the suffering caused by the maintenance of the embargo and the insistence of the United States on its position of hostility to the people of Iraq. It calls upon them to raise their voices in revealing the true character of the aggression committed and to strive for the lifting of the embargo imposed on the people of Iraq.

The members of the National Assembly of Iraq are fully confident that you understand the scale of the suffering of the people of Iraq and that you, and with you all liberal-minded people throughout the world, will endeavour to support our case and the fulfilment of our legitimate and just demands. The history of the United Nations will record your courageous humanitarian stance with a view to rescuing the people of Iraq from the grave damage done to it in violation of humanitarian principles.

(Signed) Saadoun HAMMADI
Speaker of the National Assembly